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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study comparing the development of children reared in a communal environment with that of children from upper-middle-class home environments. Variables considered were cognitive development and academic achievement. Subjects consisted of 39 children, 2 1/2 to 6 1/2 years of age, reared communally from birth, and 39 home-reared children matched for age and sex. The Synanon community provided an example of child-rearing by multiple caregivers. Up to 20 different caregivers per year rear the children, who live in peer groups from birth to adulthood. Parents average approximately three hours a week with their own children. The home-reared group was comprised of children from upper-middle-class, two-parent families, with the mother as primary caregiver. Cognitive development was assessed with the McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities. In addition, the 5- and 6-year-olds were given the Peabody Individual Achievement Test. Results indicate that multiple mothering, per se, is not detrimental to cognitive development. It was also shown that IQ can be influenced through environmental change, increasing to significantly above the average. Significant preliminary evidence showed steady increases in Synanon children's IQs from age 2 to 6, while home-reared children remained farily constant in IQ across age. The study also demonstrated that 4-year-olds can successfully be taught first grade materials. (Author/BF)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SYNANON AND HOME REARED CHILDREN

By

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SYNANON AND HOME REARED CHILDREN

A study was conducted to compare the development of Synanon children and children from upper middle-class home reared environments. The variables in the study were cognitive development and academic achievement.

Synanon provides the most extreme example of child rearing by multiple caregivers. Up to 20 different caregivers per year care for these children, with parents averaging approximately three hours per week with their children. This unique situation is coupled with a highly structured and sophisticated environment which provides maximal environmental stimulation. Thus, Synanon presents the opportunity to study the effects of multiple mothering within the context of an environment designed to accelerate child development.

In order to better understand the nature of the children's environment, a brief history and description of the larger Synanon community is necessary. Synanon was founded in 1958, as a non-profit foundation devoted to the treatment of drug addiction through a self-help community. As Synanon grew, a wide variety of people from diverse backgrounds became associated with Synanon. By the late 1960's, many people who had no drug or criminal background had moved into Synanon as an alternative lifestyle. Today, Synanon has grown to a highly complex and sophisticated community housing over 1,300 men, women, and children from almost every background. Synanon houses are located in Marshall, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Badger, California.

The Synanon School is a 24 hour-a-day living/learning community where the children live in peer groups from birth to adulthood. At this time, there are approximately 180 children living in the Synanon School, ranging in age from 6 months to 16 years. The parents of these children live in the larger Synanon community and visit their children whenever they choose. The children are divided into living groups by age and each living/learning complex is especially designed for each age group to maximize the development of children that age.

During the first 6 months, the Synanon children are cared for communally by their mothers. At 6 months, the child begins to live in the Infant Center and the mother returns to work. Here the child lives with his peers and the parents live in the larger Synanon community. The day-to-day care for the child is entirely entrusted to the caregivers (demonstrators) who are also Synanon community residents. The child's demonstrators work ten hours a day for seven days, then have seven days off.

The environments are large, open and child proofed and the children are free to explore. The furniture and equipment is

especially designed for these children. Both verticle and horizontal environments are built, with complex climbing equipment, manipulative toys, books, mobiles, mirrors and musical instruments.

Independence and self reliance are encouraged in Synanon. During the first 3½ years, a child spends the majority of his time exploring the infant program and yard unobstructed by gates, play pens and high chairs. Walks and excursions accompanied by an adult occur several times a week. By the age of 3½, the child is allowed to play in the larger Synanon community where the School is located. The area is equivalent to a very small town. By the age of 5, the child is allowed to take transportation to another Synanon settlement located three miles away unaccompanied by an adult. By the age of 6½, the child can go to neighboring towns 25 miles away with peers. Interfacility travel, as far as 500 miles away, is also begun at this time.

Daily "workshops" have been developed in each age group, beginning at age 2, where environments are designed to provide opportunities for symbolic stimulation. Demonstrators interact with the children to provide learning opportunities in language, perceptual and numerical concepts. Definite routines and structures prevail and the "curriculum" is designed around the child's developmental stages and interests.

The children establish attachments to their peers, older children, demonstrators, parents and other adults in the community, rather than to a single adult. Thus, the transference from mother to peer support and identification takes place at a much earlier age than for children reared in a single family unit.

Methods

The subjects consisted of 39 children 2½ to 6½ years of age, reared communally from birth in Synanon, and 39 home reared children matched for age and sex. Fifty-five per cent of the Synanon parents have character disorder or drug addiction backgrounds. The mean Synanon parental education is 14 years.

The home reared group was comprised of children who are being reared in upper middle-class two-parent nuclear families with the mother being the primary caregiver. The parents of these children had never been divorced, have no history of drug abuse, and have a mean educational level of 16 years. The home reared children were screened to rule out physical, mental or emotional problems.

The children's cognitive development was assessed with the McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities. Additionally, the 5 and 6 year olds were given the Peabody Individual Achievement Test, a test of academic achievement.

Results

McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities

1. Means and Standard Deviations

   The mean IQ for the Synanon children was 109 with a S_x of 10.03. The mean IQ for the home reared children was 106 with S_x of 13.07.

2. A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the IQ of the Synanon and home reared children. No significant difference was found. ($F=3.02, df=1,38; p > .05$).

3. A one-way ANOVA was performed separately for the home reared and Synanon reared children by age. The home reared children showed no age effects. ($F=.87, df\ 4, 34; p > .05$). The Synanon children showed a significant increase in IQ with age. ($F=4.51, df\ 4,34; p < .01$).

4. Two-way ANOVA - age by rearing condition. A two-way analysis of variance was performed to analyze the data by age and rearing condition. No significant interaction was found.

By Age	($F=2.43; df\ 4,68; p > .05$)
By Rearing	($F= .55; df\ 1,68; p > .05$)
Age by rearing	($F=1.57; df\ 4,68; p > .05$)

5. Test/retest of Synanon children - means and standard deviations.

   $\bar{x}$ of 105 S_x of 7.75 1975

   $\bar{x}$ of 116 S_x of 7.18 1976

6. Test/retest of Synanon children - paired t test. A paired t test showed a significant increase in IQ scores ($t=4.19; df\ 7; p < .01$) over a 1½ year period.

Peabody Individual Achievement Test

1. Means and Standard Deviations

   The mean standard score for the Synanon children was 125 with a S_x of 7.01. The mean standard score for the home reared children was 110 with a S_x of 13.71.

2. One-way ANOVA

   The Synanon children were significantly higher than the home reared children in academic achievement. ($F=10.80; df\ 1,21; p < .01$)

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Multiple mothering, per se, is not detrimental to cognitive development. Previous findings of lower IQ's of children reared by multiple caregivers is probably due to poor rearing, not multiple mothering.

2. IQ is maleable with total environmental change and can be increased significantly above average. There is good evidence that the Synanon children's IQ's are increasing from a mean of 102 at age 2, to a mean of 120 at age 6. (See the figure.) This finding was also substantiated by the test/retest study of Synanon born and reared children which showed eight 3 and 4 year olds who had a mean IQ of 105 who were retested 1½ years later to have increased their mean IQ to 116. Further research is needed to confirm this and a longitudinal study is planned.

3. Although the difference between the Synanon and home reared children, in terms of IQ, was not significant, it appears that the age effect is cancelling out the differences in rearing conditions. It does appear that the Synanon children are steadily increasing in IQ, while the home reared children remain fairly constant in IQ.

4. Children can be successfully taught first grade materials at the age of 4, thus producing children with about a one year advantage over their upper middle-class age mates and a two year advantage over age mates in general. This is good evidence to start children earlier in traditional academic work.

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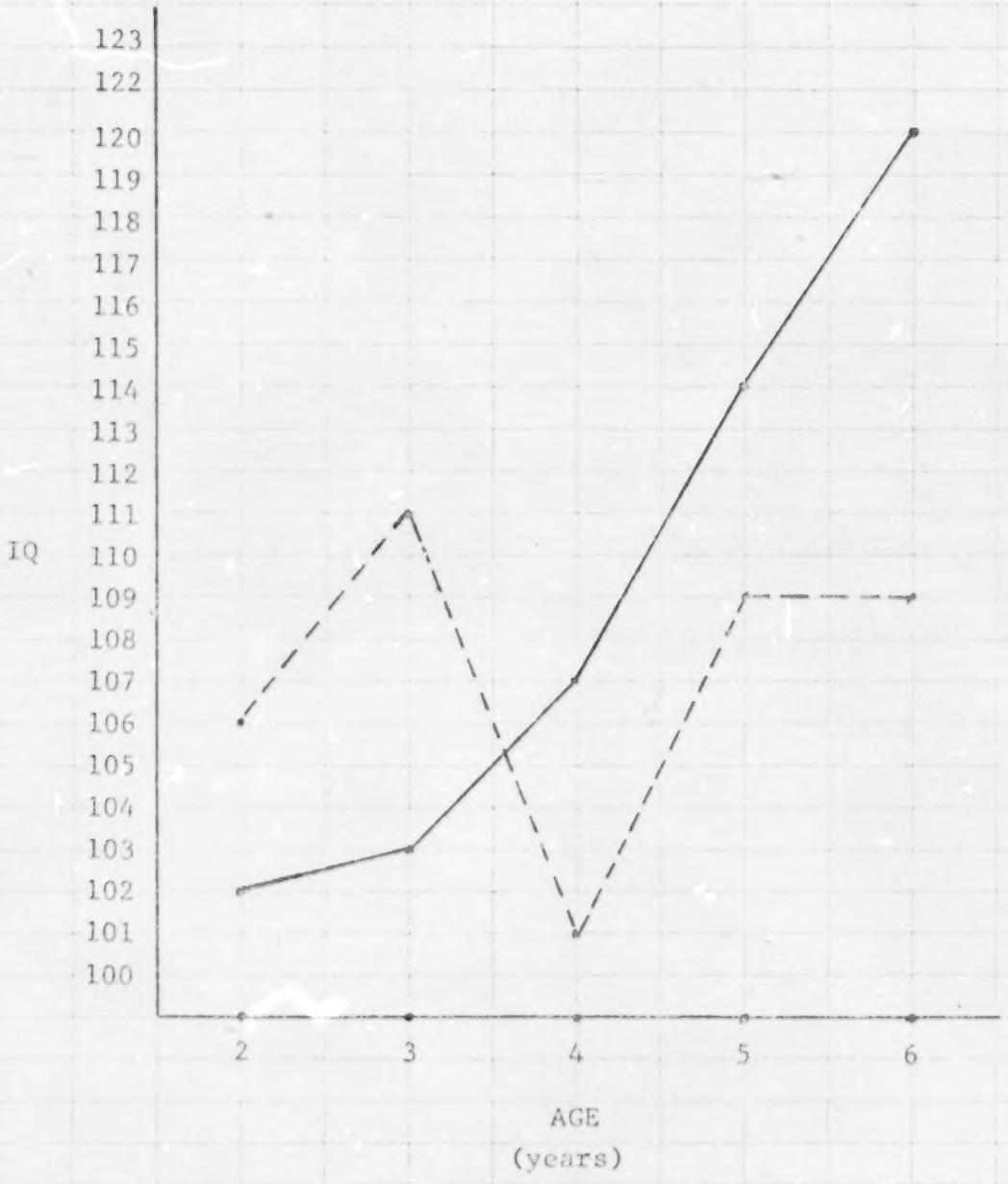
IQ BY AGE OF SYNANON AND HOME REARED CHILDREN



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